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Blaxican Identity: An Exploratory Study of Blacks/Chicanas/os in California

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Introduction

This paper explores the life experiences of *Blaxicans*, or multiracial individuals who are the products of unions that are composed of one biological (or birth) parent who is identified and designated as Mexicana/o or Chicana/o, and one parent who is identified and designated as African American or Black. Most research on racial intermarriage and multiracial offspring in the United States has concentrated on European American unions with African Americans or other people of color and their descendants. Research on "dual-minority unions" and their offspring is scant (Wallace 2001). The examination of how identity formation operates among multiracial offspring whose biological parents are non-white[1] is limited and informs the basis of this investigation of *Blaxican* identity. In this introduction, I discuss the literature related to Blaxican identity, including: Black identity, Chicana/o identity, and dual-minority multiracial identity. The goal of this paper is to investigate how mixed-race Black and Chicana/o individuals racially identify and to examine the processes that influenced their decision of racial self-identification.

Review of Relevant Literature

Black Identity

The current struggle over multiracial identity owes its genesis to the outcomes of previous struggles over racial identity and is in part the product of the institutionalization of the one-drop rule and the contradictions to which it gave rise (DaCosta 2007). The one-drop rule of hypodescent holds that individuals with *any* trace of African ancestry, regardless of the degree and no matter how slight are considered Black (Davis 2006). Stemming from slavery, the one-drop rule was crucial to maintaining Jim Crow segregation in the South. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the one-drop rule became the "commonsense" definition of Blackness throughout the United States and the legal definition in some Southern states (Davis 2002). Utilizing the one-drop rule to define Blackness had the intended purpose of prohibiting African Americans from intermarrying or having sexual contact with whites, which kept them in inferior segregated schools, and excluded them from political participation, employment, housing, and credit opportunities as well as receiving public assistance (Davis 2002). The intended goal of the rule was to define Blacks as outsiders as a means of protecting white supremacy and wealth (Daniel 2002). This racialized legacy maintains an anti-Black rhetoric that condones the subordination of anyone to whom the one-drop rule of hypodescent is applicable. While the one-drop rule once legally defined Blackness and thus excluded African Americans from resources enjoyed by whites, African Americans eventually adopted the rule as a positive source of empowerment, unity, and self-actualization as a coping mechanism for survival in an oppressive society (Wallace 2001). The movement of the 1970's spurred the affirmation of "Black is Beautiful," such that the one-drop rule became more socially acceptable in defining Blackness. Thus, Blacks used the one-drop rule, which was initially designed to further marginalize them, as a source of unification for power against an oppressive white system.

As the one-drop rule shapes how Blackness is defined, scholars and lay people continue to argue that mixed-race offspring of African ancestry remain labeled as Black (Davis 2006; Rockquemore, Laszloffy and Noveske 2006). In the popular press for example, Tiger Woods has been

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[1] In this study *white* is lowercased because it "refers not to one ethnic group, or to specified ethnic groups but to many" (Hurtado 1996: 161).

portrayed as infiltrating the white world of golf as the best Black athlete to ever grace the sport. Woods, however, refutes that claim stating that he is not Black, but "Cablinasian" a mixture of his Caucasian, Black, Indian and Asian backgrounds (Nordlinger 2001). To some extent, mixed-race individuals of European and African descent in the United States, even if phenotypically white, have internalized the one-drop rule and tend to consider themselves as Black (Daniel 2002; Wallace 2001). Furthermore, Black-white mixed race people are more likely to self-identify exclusively as Black rather than exclusively as white because of the historical legacy of the one-drop rule and the myth of white racial purity (Rockquemore and Laszloffy 2005; Davis 2002).[2]

Chicana/o Identity

Chicana/o communities are linked to the national histories of Spain, Mexico, the United States, and indigenous and tribal nations or groups (Lipsitz 1998). Chicanas/os have a unique culture within the United States, with its own traditions, history, and language composed of linguistic varieties including Chicana/o English and Chicana/o Spanish and its variants (Mendoza-Denton 1999). The identity of Chicanas/os stems from the Spanish colonization of Mexico in which racial mixing or *mestizaje* occurred between the Spanish, indigenous, and African populations (Menchaca 2001). The process of racial mixing in Mexico was Spain's socio-political colonial project with the goal of "whitening" the race and elevating Mexico in Europe's view (Hunter 2005). The concept of *mejorar la raza* (literally to improve the race) is still used today among Chicanas/os to emphasize the desirability of being light skinned, or marrying someone who is light skinned or white (Cruz-Jansen 2001; Comas-Días 1996).

Typically, when the concept of mestizaje is evoked, the African roots of Mexico are ignored (Acuña 2000; Rendón 1971; Gonzales 1967). The social and political structure of Mexico has a legacy of giving preferential advantages to people with lighter skin. Prejudices against Afro-Mexicanas/os and darker skinned indigenous and mestizo populations is part of Mexico's social fabric (Vaughn 2005), hence the omission of African slavery and ancestry in popular discourse about the national history. Consequently, Chicanas/os are considered to be mestizas/os of European and Native American descent, regardless of African ancestry or phenotypical traits (Daniel 2002). Racial mixing in Mexico has produced people whose skin colors vary from white to phenotypically Black. However, for most Chicanas/os, dark skin is associated with an indigenous ancestry and identity, while for others it is associated with Blackness and therefore stigmatized (Hunter 2005).

In the United States, around the time of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848), Mexicans were defined as a "white" population in the state of California's attempt to assign Mexicans to already defined legal racial categories (Omi and Winant 1994); however, they were still treated de facto as non-whites by European Americans (Haney López 2003). The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo stated that any Mexican who chose to stay in the United States after the Mexican-American War would be granted full citizenship. However, there was a linkage between being a citizen of the United States and whiteness, that is to say, in order to be a citizen one must also be white. Citizenship in the United States meant that Mexican-decent Americans were necessarily designated de jure as white. However, the United States government broke the treaty's conditions and consequently the more powerful and dominant white landowners and the larger European American community, backed by the government, increasingly came to view Mexicans as a de facto racialized ethnic minority (Hunter 2005). Since the 1930s, members of the Mexican community, including community leaders, argued that Mexicans were white, despite European Americans' rejection of this idea, and they continued to stress an assimilationist ideology promoting a white identity (Haney López 2003). However, the assertion of a white identity did not apply to everyone, particularly those who were from the working class, which was mainly composed of people with dark skin and limited English language proficiency, and who could not pass as white (Haney López 2003). Some argued that the efforts to assimilate Mexicans solely de-Mexicanized them but failed to Americanize them in a sense of fully incorporating them as white (García 1997).

With mass deportations of Mexicans during the Great Depression, many of whom were born in the United States, Mexican people's consciousness began to change. The Civil Rights movement of the 1960s changed how Chicanas and Chicanos viewed themselves. They began to reject whiteness

[2] For examples of mixed race Black and white individuals that exclusively self-identify as Black, see Rockquemore, Kerry Ann and Tracey Laszloffy. 2005. *Raising Biracial Children.* Lanham: AltaMira Press.

and deny claims that they were and should be assimilating given their status as an *internally colonized* group in the United States (Blauner 2000; Mirandé 1985; Barrera 1979), a position held along with African Americans and other historically marginalized groups. Segregated employment, education, and housing solidified a consciousness among Mexican origin people that they were not white. Chicanas/os began to assert themselves as proud members of a brown race (Haney López 2003).[3] The term Chicana/o, originally a Spanish derogatory word to define Mexicans was used to embrace a unique cultural heritage (Mirandé 1985). In the face of discrimination, intolerance, and erasure in a white society, the Chicano movement sought to define what it meant to be Chicano (Haney López 2003; Rendón 1971; Gonzales 1967). As men in the Chicano movement solidified an identity for themselves, they did so however without including women and attempted to undermine women's realities. As defined by some of the dominant male voices in the movement, a Chicana's main role was to support Chicanos and maintain the race through bearing and raising Chicana/o children (Blackwell 2003).

Accordingly, Chicana feminists articulated a Chicana identity for themselves that included aspects of race, class, gender, and sexuality (Pérez 1999). For example, Gloria Anzaldúa (1999) calls for a new *mestiza* consciousness that rejects static notions of the self and essentialist categories of what it means to be Chicana including notions of skin color and Spanish proficiency. Anzaldúa defines the mestiza as being "cradled in one culture, sandwiched between two cultures, straddling all three cultures and their value systems, *la mestiza* undergoes a struggle of flesh, a struggle of borders an inner war" (Anzaldúa 1999:100). Anzaldúa strategically deconstructs Chicana identity with the goal of creating a post-colonial consciousness using the notion of multiple identities that called for embracing all notions of self, including the European and indigenous backgrounds, to escape the oppressive confines of colonial discourse (Pérez 1999). However, this post-colonial consciousness differs from an anti-colonial consciousness that shaped Chicana/o identity in the 1960's in that an anti-colonial consciousness operated under stringent and essentialist binaries such as the colonized/colonizer.

Despite attempts to anti-essentialize Chicana/o identity, some individuals continue to operate under essentialist notions of Chicanisma/o.[4] Initially, Chicana/o identity was socially constructed in theory using the concept of mestizaje as a radical form of strategic anti-essentialism based on embracing European, Native, and African components.[5] Over time, for some Chicana/o individuals and scholars on the subject, the idea of mestizaje has been overlooked or dismissed. Consequently, Chicana/o identity is increasingly socially constructed as a "mono-race" and exclusive identity and category, leaving little space for differences and multiple identities within the concept of Chicanisma/o. Chicanas/os currently are subject to questions about their racial and ethnic authenticity when they either have lighter skin or cannot speak Spanish (Hunter 2005).

Dual-Minority Multiracial Identity

Following the elimination of anti-miscegenation laws with the *Loving v. Virginia* decision (1967), interracial marriage and multiracial births in the United States have increased (Davis 2006; Daniel and Castañeda-Liles 2006; Root 1996). According to the year 2000 Census, 6.8 million people

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[3] The *East LA Thirteen* and *Biltmore Six* cases were significant in proving that Mexicans existed as a distinct group and could be discriminated against. This was difficult to prove given that the Mexican community had some success in the past to argue that they were white.

[4] The term "strategic essentialism" was coined by Indian literary critic and theorist Gayatari Spivak to refer to a tactic that nationalities, ethnic groups, or "minority" groups can utilize to present themselves to achieve certain goals. Strong differences may exist between members of these groups, and amongst themselves as they engage in continuous debates. Yet it is sometimes advantageous for them to "essentialize" themselves and project their group identity in a simplified and reductionist manner that tends to focus on one axis of experience, identity, and ultimately, oppression (Landry and Maclean 1995, 7, 54–71, 159, 204, 295).

[5] Strategic essentialism" (Lipsitz 2003, 31–5) refers to a tactic that nationalities, ethnic groups, or "minority" groups can employ by emphasizing the strong differences that may exist between members of these groups, and amongst themselves as they engage in continuous debates in order achieve their goals. While strong similarities may exist between members of these groups, it considered advantageous for them to "anti-essentialize" themselves and project their group identity in a complex manner in order to address more than axis of experience, identity, and ultimately oppression, as well as the interlocking and ambiguous nature of these phenomena.

in the United States reported more than one race.[6] The significance of "mixed-race" has not been adequately examined within the sociological literature on racialization (Parker and Song 2001). Furthermore, research on race/ethnicity[7] has concentrated on the Black/white color line with lesser attention paid to other racial/ethnic formations. It follows that research on multiraciality has focused primarily on Black-white multiracial offspring (Korgen and O'Brien 2006; Twine 2006; Spickard and Daniel 2004; Davis 2002; Root 1996) and to a lesser extent on Asian-white and Mexican-white multiracial offspring (Williams-León and Nakashima 2001; Liles 2005; Jiménez 2003; Salgado de Snyder, Lopez and Padilla 1982). Less scholarly attention has centered on "dual-minority" multiracial individuals (Wallace 2001). Multiraciality is not generalizable and not all mixes are the same. Each is a product of specific historical influences, racial hierarchies and power relations and these varying histories of power are carried within the mixed race body (Kwan and Speirs 2004). Therefore, it is important to highlight the need for more complex theoretical conceptualizations of the experiences and identity development of dual-minority multiracials.

Dual-minority or "double-minority" multiracials have birth parents that are both identified and designated as non-white and from different racialized ethnic groups. Dual-minority multiracials are distinct within the multiracial population because their parentage does not include a white parent, although either one or both parents may have European ancestry. Dual-minorities' experiences may differ starkly from majority-minority multiracials, particularly if they belong to two racial and ethnic minority groups that have historically been at odds with one another (Hall and Cooke 2001). For example, Blacks and Latinas/os in the United States tend to compete for the lowest paying employment in the formal labor market (Betancur 2005) and experience racially-driven warfare against one another in prison institutions and on the streets. Identification with one race/ethnicity may cause difficulty for inclusion with another racial group (King and DaCosta 1996). Furthermore, the social experiences of dual-minority multiracials differ depending on particular racial/ethnic cultural backgrounds. In the next section I discuss the methods used in my study.

Methodology

Method

To study the identity formations and life experiences of Blaxicans in California, I conducted face-to-face and telephone interviews with 12 individuals. I began the interviewing stage in July 2006 and ended in January 2007. I used a semi-structured agenda using a grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss 1967) to analyze and interpret the data collected. The grounded theory approach focuses on the discovery of theory in data, rather than testing data based on established theory (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw 1995). Given that I began this research as an exploratory study or one without prior expectations (Schutt 2001), I felt that the above approaches to data collection and analysis were the most appropriate methods of getting at the most significant aspects of a Blaxican identity from those that know it most intimately.

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[6] "The Two or More Races Population: 2000." Census 2000 Brief, issued November 2001. (http://www.census.gov/prod/2001pubs/c2kbr01-6.pdf). The year 2000 was the first time in Census history that people were allowed to mark more than one race. Data indicate that 1.6 percent, or 4, 856, 136individuals of the nation's population of 301, 621, 157 identify with two or more races. This is a 25 percent increase since the 2000 census when multiracial individuals totaled 4 million. Initially multiracial individuals totaled 7 million on the 2000 census. This figure was modified to 4 million to correct misreporting of respondents who, for example, checked "white" or "Black" but also wrote in "Hispanic" or the equivalent in "Some Other Race." These individuals identified as "white Hispanics" or "Black Hispanics" not "Two Or More Races." Mike Stuckley, "Multiracial Americans Surge in Number, Voice: Obama Candidacy Focuses New Attention on Their Quest for Understanding." MSNBC, 28 May 2008, http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/24542138/; "Table 6. Resident Population by Sex, Race, and Hispanic-Origin Status," *Annual Estimates of the Population by Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin for the United States: April 1, 2000 to July 1, 2007* (NC-EST2007-03), Population Division, U.S. Census Bureau, 1 May 2008.

[7] Some scholars view ethnicity as a matter of culture and race as (presumptive) biology. (See Kwan and Speirs, 2004.)

Sampling

I used multiple sampling strategies including: snowball, internet postings on a popular classified web site, internet publications in independent newspapers, massive emails through academic list serves, posting leaflets, and by word of mouth. I used this approach because I had a limited sample of people who do not live in close proximity to one another. I had a difficult time identifying a site where I would find Blaxican people all at once. My target sample consisted of people over the age of 18 who resided anywhere in California.

The sampling tactic of snowballing involves one member of the sampling frame introducing the researcher to other members. I also relied on networks that I had established as a long time resident of Sacramento, California. As a Chicana raising a Blaxican son, I maintained a network with other Chicanas with Blaxican children for over five years, who subsequently became my key informants. My role as a semi-insider helped in recruiting possible volunteers because I already had contacts with people who knew Blaxican individuals. To supplement the snowballing strategy, I also posted bulletins for volunteers on Craigslist, a popular online classifieds listing site, in the following places: Bakersfield, Chico, Fresno, Humboldt, Inland Empire, Los Angeles, Merced, Modesto, Monterey Bay, Orange County, Palm Springs, Redding, Sacramento, San Diego, San Francisco, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, and Ventura.

In addition, given the higher rate of participants from the Sacramento region, I posted study information once a month from July 2006 to January 2007 in the online editions of *Sacramento News and Review*, a local independent newspaper. Furthermore, I sent emails through list serves on the California State University, Sacramento campus with the help of the McNair Scholar's Program, and the Early Opportunity Program. After interviewing one woman who belonged to a multicultural sorority, she offered to send out a massive email to her sorority sisters across California. The word of mouth came mainly from people who were "looking out" for me and knew someone who was Blaxican and passed along the study information. In all, six of the respondents I reached were through the various Internet postings, and five were reached through snowballing, while the remaining interviewee was reached by a flyer left on a college campus. Finally, the size of the sample in this study is small, and therefore external validity is low. In other words, the results of this study can only be generalized from a specific setting and small group of people, and cannot be generalized to many situations and many groups of people. In the next section, I will discuss the questions asked of the respondents.

Question Areas

All of the interviewees were asked descriptive questions including: age, place of birth, present city of residence, parents' racial ethnic identification, where their parents were born, number of siblings they had, highest educational level obtained, their class status growing up and presently, and how they identified racially and ethnically. The questions from which I collected the descriptive information were standard across all interviews and asked randomly throughout the conversations when I felt it was the appropriate time to ask. However, in the beginning of each interview, I did inform the interviewees that I hoped we could talk about family history, issues of identity involving school experiences, friendships, romantic relationships and networks, and family socialization. Next, I give an overall demographic description of the participants I interviewed.

Demographic Profiles

Five females and seven males participated in this study. The respondents' age ranged from 21 to 45, and the majority were in their twenties. Only two of the respondents were born outside of California, while the others were born in places in California as far north as Redding and as far south as San Diego. I included the city of residence at the time of the interview; here respondents place of residence ranges from Sacramento to San Diego. The information I posted aimed at recruiting volunteers that are individuals whose biological parents are Mexican or Chicana/o and African American.[8] Six of the respondents have fathers of Mexican ancestry, and mothers who are African American. Of the six fathers that are of Mexican ancestry, four are Chicano (born in the United

[8] A few of the responents' had parents with other known ancestry other than Mexican or African American. Some parents were also mixed with Japanese and Native American, however, they identified as Black.

States), and two are Mexican, born in Mexico. The remaining six respondents have African American fathers and mothers that are Chicana (of Mexican ancestry, and born in the United States), with the exception of one mother who is a Mexican national. Table 1 provides demographic information of the respondents.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Name*	Sex	Age	Father	Mother	Residency
Frances Tompson	F	45	Black/Native	Chicana	Sacramento
Dania Romero	F	40	Black	Chicana	Sacramento
Julius Grace	M	37	Black	Chicana	Long Beach
Roland Sanchez	M	35	Chicano	Black/Native	Bakersfield
Eric Lopez	M	31	Chicano	Black	Fresno
Kiara Barksdale	F	23	Chicano	Black	Salinas
John Coleman	M	23	Black	Chicana	San Diego
LaTrice Johnson	F	23	Black/Japanese	Chicana	Sacramento
Gaby Mayfield	F	23	Chicano	Black	Fresno
Eduardo Flores	M	22	Mexicano**	Black/Native	Sacramento
Antonio Flores	M	22	Mexicano**	Black/Native	Antioch
Desmon Jackson	M	21	Black	Mexicana**	San Diego

*Names are Pseudonyms. **Mexican Nationals

The names of the respondents have been changed to provide anonymity. I changed the names to reflect their actual African American and Spanish origins. The majority of the participants were residents of either Northern or Central California counties. California is among the top ten states with the highest percentage of "two or more races" in the 2000 Census, with over one million residents who identified themselves in this way.[9] Ultimately, the respondents' place of residence was consistent with the "multiracial belt" around the Central Valley and greater Sacramento regions where there is a concentration of counties with higher percentages of multiracial people (Park, Meyers and Wei 2001). As far as education was concerned, the majority of the respondents pursued degrees beyond high school. Eight of twelve respondents were from working-class backgrounds, although two felt they had transitioned to the middle-class as they got older, and two were from middle-class backgrounds. To determine class status, I asked the respondents questions that would help determine their social and economic capital.[10] The next section explores how respondents racially self-identify and the processes that influence their decisions.

Negotiating a Multiracial Identity

During the interviews, I was interested in learning about how interviewees racially self-identified, as well as about the process that brought them to their decision to identify as multiracial Black and Mexican. All of the informants in this study self-identify as Black and Mexican and most of the respondents use "Blaxican" as a racial label of choice. That is to say, respondents viewed themselves as a *blending* of Mexican and Black as a mixed identity. Overwhelmingly, respondents chose a combined Black and Mexican, or, Blaxican racial/ethnic identity, rather than a monoracial claim even if their phenotypes and cultural leanings favor one group over the other. A blended identity is one that is similar in nature to Gloria Anzaldúa's (1999) "border identity" or an identity that spans across the boundaries of existing categories. Therefore, a blended identity also straddles boundaries, yet exists on a continuum and does not imply equal and perfect balance (Daniel 1996; Rockquemore and Laszloffy 2005). A blended identity resists the dichotomization and hierarchical valuation of African American and European American (in this case Chicana/o) cultural and racial differences (Daniel 1996). For example, Eduardo, a twenty-two-year-old student studying in Sacramento identifies as Blaxican. "I usually say I am Blaxican because I don't want to deny both of

[9] "The Two or More Races Population: 2000." Census 2000 Brief, issued November 2001. http://www.census.gov/prod/2001pubs/c2kbr01-6.pdf

[10] Bourdieu, Pierre. 1989. "Social Space and Symbolic Power." *Sociological Theory.* 7: 14-25

them [Black and Mexican backgrounds] so I always say Blaxican. Off top, they already know what I am talking about" (Eduardo, age 22). By telling people that he is Blaxican, Eduardo is acknowledging all of his ancestries, and offers an easy way to articulate that he is both Black and Mexican without having to give a lengthy explanation.

A statement made by Gaby, a twenty-three-year-old woman living in Fresno, summarizes the overall sentiment of what it means to be Blaxican:

> When I say it [Blaxican] I am trying to let them know that this is a whole other race of people. There are races, but then there is also another one, there doesn't just need to be one whole race like just Black or just Mexican, or just Chinese. You can mix two people together and create a new race, I do have two legs and a heart and a brain, I am walking around, and I do exist. So I am trying to let people know that this does exist. It is a new type of person. And it is not just the body that is there, it is a whole new culture. (Gaby, age 23).

In the simplest sense, Blaxican means the mixture of African Americans and Chicanas/os physically, ancestrally and culturally. By choosing a Blaxican identity, informants are resisting the one-drop rule that would define them as Black, as well as mono-raciality. The active resistance to mono-raciality, and the one-drop rule is significant because these constructs characterize the United States racial order that have historically been used as a way of maintaining white racial supremacy and power. Next, I describe some of the structural and interactional forces that shaped Blaxican identity and experience.

Influences on Racial Identity

External forces such as family, school, peers, and residential neighborhoods influenced Blaxican identity development and experience. Elementary school and junior high school were two particular life stages when participants experienced incidents that forced them to confront directly the meaning of their racial identities. Instruction about race indeed occur within the school setting not only in explicit curriculum but also in lessons about race in which racial difference and similarities were presented in both obvious and hidden ways by staff, parents, and peers (Lewis 2003). Families also play a pivotal role in an individual's racial identity development, and are places where children receive the most powerful messages about their own identities (Rockquemore and Laszloffy 2005).

LaTrice, a twenty-three-year-old student living in Sacramento remembered that the first time she reflected on her racial identity was while attending a predominantly white elementary school in a working-class neighborhood in Redding, California when a classmate called her a racial epithet:

> The first time was when a girl called me the "n" word in elementary school. I don't think I understood, and I went crying to my mom, "What does this mean?" I knew what it meant but I didn't understand the concept. My mom wanted to know who she was. And I said, "Mom calm down!" (LaTrice, age 23).

Although LaTrice expressed that her Chicana single-mother did the best that she could do to instill knowledge and pride about both of her heritages despite the absence of her father, she could not prepare her for the hard blows of racist acts that loomed in her childhood. Being the only child of color in most of her Redding, California public schools, LaTrice knew that her identity was unlike that of the rest of her peers:

> My mom always made it clear to talk to me about why I was different from other people. When I was younger it was harder because my dad wasn't really apart of my life. My mom was a single-parent, and it was harder because when I was younger I looked a lot more African American than I think I do now, but then I spoke Spanish. My grandparents helped raise me and they didn't speak English. I had episodes of kids calling me names, calling me the "n" word in elementary school and even junior high. I had my grandpa who told me that I was not Black, but Mexican. So I never really had a place because I grew up in a predominately white high school and city. It was different, because I looked one thing then I identified with more of the Mexican culture because that was the way that I was raised, I spoke Spanish (LaTrice, age 23).

As a young woman, LaTrice received contradictory messages about her identity. She had to negotiate what it meant to be perceived as African American on the outside, although she felt more connected to Mexican culture. On the one hand, her mother was reinforcing positive images about being Black and Chicana; on the other, her Mexican grandfather rejected her Blackness altogether and tried to convince her she was not Black. LaTrice's peers at school reinforced the fact that they saw her as Black by using racial epithets that marked her as such.

Likewise, Kiara, a twenty-three-year-old participant, remembers that the first time she thought about her race was also after she was called a racial slur:

> I remember this one time when I was walking home from school and somebody drove up next to me and called me a nigger, and I told my mom and I said someone called me a nigger what does that mean? Then she was pissed off. I have been called wetback; you know I've been called a lot of names, a lot of them by adults, sadly enough (Kiara, age 23).

At a young age, Kiara learned about the negative characteristics associated with both Blacks and Chicanas/os. She spoke about a racist schoolteacher and recounted an example to me:

> I have come across teachers that are very racist, people very ignorant, kids just mean. I remember I was at school and a teacher knew that I was Black and Mexican and she kinda called me out in the middle of class and I was in awe. Every body in that class were all Mexican and she called me out in class and told me that I had to leave, I couldn't be there anymore because I was Black. So immediately right there the students kind of separated me, once she said that, because I had no problems till then. Then when she called me out right there I noticed that a lot of them started saying things to me (Kiara, age 23).

In this Salinas, California public school classroom a white teacher announced to the class that Kiara was Black, and her Chicana/o classmates abruptly alienated her. Kiara's teacher made sure that everyone in the classroom was interpreting her in the "correct" way. Accordingly, she was not being accepted as Chicana but rather, as Black, which therefore meant she did not belong. As an authority figure, the teacher validated the Chicana/o students and sanctioned behaviors that would "other" Kiara not only in relation to whites but Chicanas/os as well.

The racial composition of school contexts and residential living spaces also awakened a consciousness of being Blaxican for Kiara. She noticed the differences in how she was perceived and understood by others when she and her Black single-mother moved from one town to another, in Central California. After living in a predominately Black neighborhood in Fresno, the two moved to a Mexican barrio in Salinas:

> Me and my mother, we lived in Fresno with my family for a while, and I grew up in an all Black neighborhood, and we moved from there when I was really young, probably about three or four and we came to Salinas, California. We moved to the east side, which is basically like little Mexico. Every one was Mexican in just that area. When I was a kid I looked Mexican. My skin tone was very very light and my mother was a single parent so she was the only Black woman in that area and so I knew something was up when people would look at us funny, and definitely look at her funny, like what'cha doing with this little Mexican baby? (Kiara, age 23).

Kiara had lighter skin than her mother and the neighbors questioned their relationship as mother and daughter with looks of curiosity, disapproval, and disbelief. As a light skinned baby, Kiara was seen as Chicana, yet her mother was marked as not belonging because she was the only Black woman in the barrio. Phenotype and skin color is a common theme throughout the interviews, and are aspects of Blaxican racial/ethnic identity that informants constantly had to negotiate. The above examples provide a brief glimpse of how family, school, peers and experiences in residential neighborhoods inform and influence Blaxican identity development and consciousness.

Conclusion

This paper briefly highlighted some of processes by which multiracial individuals of African American and Mexican descent came to make choices about their multiracial identities within the context of California. The review of literature on multiracial identity evinced that most studies focus on multiracial identity formations of individuals with white and non-white birth parents, and heavily ignores the experiences of people with two non-white parents. Most often, literature on multiraciality has focused on a Black-white duality, or white and some other group of color. Research on "dual-minority" multiracial identities has not been at the forefront of research, yet adds significant depth and breadth to our understanding multiracial identity formations. This research contributes to the literature on dual-minority multiracial identities and seeks to give powerful insights into the social construction of race. This study focused on the life experiences of 12 Blaxican persons in the state of California. The primary impetus for this paper was the interest in racial identity choices of Blaxican individuals, and most important, the processes' that underscored these choices. Unlike other studies that only seek to know *how* multiracial people self-identify; this study sought to understand *why* individuals identified as Blaxican.

I found that all informants identified as Black and Mexican, or Blaxican and this racial/ethnic identity implies the blending of Chicana/o and Black cultural, ancestral and physical characteristics. This paper also analyzed the process that underpinned how respondents chose to racially identify. Family socialization, social contact with peers, educational experiences and neighborhood environments were described as critical spaces that influenced their identity choices. Furthermore, this research illustrates the complex negotiation of race/ethnicity that occurs among Blaxican individuals. Unlike other studies that focused on multiracials with African ancestry, informants in this study do not identify as Black in accordance to the one-drop rule. Rather, informants in this study actively resist mono-raciality and the one-drop rule by electing an identity that blends Chicana/o and African American ancestries and cultures.

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